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Gates nomination wins panel approval

By Bill Gertz
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The Senate Intelligence Committee yesterday voted unanimously to recommend the nomination of Robert Gates to be the next CIA deputy director.

In a rare open session, the committee questioned Mr. Gates on subjects ranging from the administration's covert support for anti-communist rebels to the agency's handling of Soviet defector Vitaly Yurchenko.

A full Senate vote on Mr. Gates' nomination as the No. 2 man at the CIA is not expected before next Tuesday.

Mr. Gates, a career CIA analyst with no experience in clandestine operations, defended the agency's increased use of covert paramilitary operations as a necessary "gray area" between diplomacy and full-scale military action. He also said it is needed to counter Soviet covert operations that cost the Kremlin \$4 billion a year.

He said the United States had to develop other "instruments" to carry out foreign policy or "simply walk away" from global problems of terrorism and Soviet expansionism.

"One of those other instruments available to the United States is special activities or covert action," Mr. Gates said. "I believe that covert action is an appropriate instrument of

foreign policy as long as it is undertaken in the context of a larger policy."

He said senior administration officials regularly brief the intelligence committees to clarify how covert programs fit within the foreign policy context.

Covert action, he said, often times is incorrectly perceived as "an independent CIA foreign policy."

"That is not the case at all," he said. "The decision to undertake covert action is a policy decision... made by the National Security Council. CIA is the instrument by which it is implemented."

"I believe that when that decision is made that CIA has the obligation to implement it effectively and as efficiently as possible," he said.

Mr. Gates said obscuring U.S. involvement in large paramilitary operations has always been a problem but helps other governments who benefit from the covert programs.

The use of covert action, he added, should not be abandoned because of disclosures to the press.

"There is no question that we take some hits in the public media and in terms of perhaps some people's perception of us because of our involvement in these activities," he said. But he said recent trends indicate that less attention has been paid to the CIA covert actions than to questions of foreign policy.

Under questioning from Sen. Frank Murkowski, Alaska Republican, Mr. Gates acknowledged that the CIA could not account for who was responsible for allowing Soviet defector Vitaly Yurchenko to leave a Georgetown restaurant last November and return to the Soviet embassy where he denounced the CIA.

As a result of the affair, Mr. Gates said the CIA thoroughly reformed its program for handling defectors.

Asked by Sen. William Cohen, Maine Republican, to describe an ideal defector program, Mr. Gates called for setting up a division with

one director to handle defectors "from the time a defector walks in or appears on our doorstep until resettlement."

He also said the CIA should assign a single case officer to work with each defector "so that we would

know when [a defector] is beginning to experience some doubts or psychological problems."

Under a policy dating back to the late CIA director Allen Dulles 40 years ago, the CIA has refrained from placing restraints on new defectors in order to encourage others to defect.

"It seems to me, based on our experience with Yurchenko, that we perhaps ought to step back at least one step from that and at a minimum deal with defectors in a way that... they can't just sort of step out the door and into the Soviet embassy," Mr. Gates said.

But he said that "in terms of our interest in enticing other potential defectors," the CIA does not favor restraining defectors for long periods.



Photo by Kevin T. Gilbert The Washington Times

Robert Gates (left), CIA deputy director designee, is advised by Sen. John Warner at confirmation hearings before the Senate Intelligence Committee.